

# Distortion and Misinformation in the Television Journalism about the Brazilian Semi-arid

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**Abstract**— *The distorted and stereotyped view of the Brazilian Semi-arid insists on predominating in journalistic productions on these territories. On TV, the treatment of the news culminates in misinformation. This article intends to show how the re-signification of a content can completely alter the initial proposal of a journalistic production, after the re-editing of the content to fit it within the desired editorial line. Two subjects were analyzed, the original, produced by TV Caatinga and the version of the aforementioned report republished by TV Cultura. To do so, we used the Contrastive Ethno-research to deepen the studied phenomenon in order to understand it jointly apprehend it, create relationships, encompass, combine and conjugate it. At the end of the analysis, it was observed a complete adulteration of the original version, which not only compromised the proposal of the initial content, as drastically altered its meaning to reinforce a negative and distorted image on the semi-arid territories.*

**Keywords**— *Journalism Contextualized with the Brazilian Semi-arid, Brazilian Semi-arid, Tele-journalism.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Bank robbery is “New Cangaço”, the water crisis is draught, verification gives way to misinformation. The textual construction is determined and feedbacked by the imagery marked by the climate when the territory described is the northeastern Brazilian hinterland.

It was not the media that has created the portrait of the Brazilian Semi-arid (BSA) based on drought and scourge, but it certainly helped to consolidate it. With dramatic images, colors, testimonials and *background*<sup>1</sup>, the television continues to reinforce the distorted and stereotyped approach to these territories.

This inaccurate representation has harmed the emancipation and dignity of the existences of these territories in the most diverse forms, whether economic, social or political.

Contrary to this static and uninformed representation, the Contextualized Journalism concerning the Brazilian Semi-arid (CJBAS) emerges as a proposal in the area of communication to guide these territories

without limiting the climatic determinism that use drought to substantiate all the social malpractices and injustices in those territories. According to Santos (2018, p. 25), the Contextualized Journalism in the Brazilian Semi-arid

*is a proposition that invests in the various possibilities of representations about these territories that approach the reality, without omissions and distortions, with a diversity of production senses, themes, and approaches, in which the journalistic approach moves in a balanced way with the educational proposal.*

This concept is based on critical elements that guide the contextualized representation of these territories by the media, mainly from the knowledge about the specificities of the Semi-arid.

The CJBAS was consolidated because of a Master's research conducted from 2014 to 2016 and that in 2018 was published in a book. However, the work of thinking the journalistic narrative about the Semi-arid began long before that.

This kind of undistorted educative approach was developed over thirteen years from the practical exercise at two Universities located in the very heart of the semi-arid area.

Firstly, by the students of the Multimedia Journalism Course at the State of Bahia University – UNEB in Juazeiro, through the Extension Project Experimental Television Programs – WEBTV Uneb Juazeiro (2007), in the production of TV reports and programs which presents a differentiated way of approaching these territories with accurate information and without using the scarcity of rain as an explanation and exclusive cause to explain all the historical neglect that marked the management on the population of BSA.

Secondly, by TV Caatinga, TV Universitaria of the Federal University of the Valley of Sao Francisco – UNIVASF, which expanded the contextualized production to other formats, aside from the journalistic one. With instructive programs of different proposals, the semi-arid theme is deepened and discussed, encouraging other dissertations on these territories.

<sup>1</sup> Background music used in radio or television journalism while the text is read by a newspaperperson.

These digital platforms behave similarly to what Celia Del Palacio Montiel (2009, p. 9-11) witnessed at the Mexican press. The author perceived that some regional characteristics, which distinguish one place from the other, also interfere in their production, distribution and content process, for example.

Applying partnerships with other television channels, TV Caatinga succeeds in distributing its content to other regions of Brazil, especially to the Southeast and Midwest. By sharing a wide variety of products, with many approaches on the semiarid and its population as dominant themes, the educational TV UNIVASF proposes other views and reflections on these territories, in regions that generally produce and reproduce speech on the backlands in which predominates the climatic determinism.

This labor of sending contextualized content is made since 2014, initially with the TV Futura and subsequently with TV Brasil, NBR, TV Cultura, TV UFMA, TV Unifor, Canal Saúde, TVE Bahia, TV Pernambuco and TVU, those last one from the state of Pernambuco. These broadcasters have educational characteristics, whether public, state or university owned, and are on open television channels, therefore, as television media reach a large share of the population.

Depending on the partner network, the content can be displayed in journalistic programs with reports and interviews, or the schedule, with educational programs, or still in both forms, journalist or programming.

With the systematic dissemination of this content contextualized with the Brazilian Semiarid in these broadcasters for at least four years, we ask ourselves the following question: How is this media appropriating and re-signifying this content in its programming?

Therefore, the objective was to investigate as journalists of open television broadcasters, such as TV Cultura, appropriating and re-signifying the contents contextualized with the semiarid in their schedules, to reinforce, or not the misinformation about these backland territories and the people who inhabit them.

Once "human ecology can be defined as a multidisciplinary social science for the privileged approach of mutual dependence between social and natural systems" (PIRES, 2011, p. 3) and still, it can emphasize "the cultural aspects and technological management of the environmental impacts posed by human civilization" (p. 3), this research was associated with the field of Human Ecology for its contribution to the understanding of the mutual action between man and nature.

To find the answers, this paper analyzed the case of a news show presented at TV Caatinga, and a version of it re-edited and enlarged, displayed in a national network at the Jornal of Cultura of TV Cultura, to verify the re-

signification of the original content. It was used as a methodology predominantly guided by Contrastive Ethnography, comparing and confronting "senses and meanings as a device of multi-experiential and trans-singular objectification". (MACEDO, 2018, p. 90). Research that seeks a generative inter-criticism based, as directed by the author, in an interpretation formed by the "encounter between opinions, points of view, and definition of situations".

## II. THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

The research is based on the Contextualized Journalism with relation to the Brazilian Semiarid, a concept under construction in the field of Communication. The term contextualization relates to the specificity of the semiarid areas since it is a very peculiar condition that affects its representation in the media.

Moreover, even though we are all socially, historically, politically, economically and culturally contextualized, we are not always inserted in our reality, but in emanating center of an "official" speech (SANTOS, 2018, p. 26). Concerning education, Josemar Martins states that discuss the contextualization is also argue about the decolonization.

(...) And now it is no longer about the relationship of colonization of one country over another, but especially of human groups about others, regions about others, of narratives about others. It is therefore about recognizing tiny colorizations that stick to more considerable oppositions that are embedded and consolidated in everyday language, the official language, in sexualities, identities, regionalities, etc. (MARTINS, 2004, p. 4).

Similarly, the journalism made about the Brazilian Semiarid is decontextualized and colonized, since it insists on disregarding very particular issues related to those territories, such as the historical disregard that causes social inequity and contributes to the constant misinformation on this matter.

Once the methodology in Human Ecology is fundamentally multidisciplinary to enable the exploitation of many simultaneous interactions in both human and ecological systems, we have to appeal to study the field of communication and the production of senses to the TV journalism.

The research also based on Human Ecology theorists, namely Juracy Marques, Felix Gattari, and Iva Miranda Pires to reflect the way the semiarid territories and their people are being designed to all of the countries from an original contextualized approach.

Whereas “society changes, or is maintained through a participation process, in which the decisions define the economic and social paths” (LIMA, 1984, p. 25), and wherefrom this question is posed, it is believed that the continuous exposition of these contents contextualized on these spaces located in other regions of the country and that are configured as emanating issues of an “official” statement that may contribute to the shifts of paradigms about the representation of the semiarid and its people, since it provokes a look on those territories on a more diverse and closer way to the reality. Featuring this movement of production of content that looks for representing the semiarid territories throughout its dimension, TV Caatinga would become the pioneer in this action that also contributes to the dissemination of knowledge about these territories.

Trying to understand how man relates to nature, Human Ecology also helps us in this study which seeks to understand how the newspaperman represents it in the media when the agenda refers to the semiarid territories.

A “retraction” frozen in time going through the processes of homogenization and invisibility of the collective identities formed by these structures.

As Marques (2012, p. 15) alerts us: “whenever we try to explain something to someone about our truth it becomes a sign that it is denied”, as evidenced in the practice of Contextualized Journalism with the BSA. The author still questions us: “How to think about media, communicational flows amongst humans, homogenizing collectives, and behaviorist” (MARQUES, 2012, p. 27), and yet more, collectivities that are “being fed by the speeches of visible individualities resembling the invisible collectiveness” (p. 27).

Gattari strengthens by asserting that heterogenic processes should replace homogenizing practices, so that specific cultures and the singularity, the exception, and the rarity may flourish and “work together with a state order or at least the less heavy possible.” (2011, p. 35).

In this specific methodology, the authors consulted were Jorge Duarte in the definition of an in-depth interview, and Antonio Carlos Gil in the concept of research-action. Also in the field of research on Human Ecology, we used Maria José Araujo Lima, as well as Emilio Morán, who contributed with the definition of ethnoecology, while Roberto Sidney Macedo is going to be used in the Contrastive Ethno-research.

### III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was carried out from the content displayed in the partner network of TV Caatinga, i.e., TV Cultura. The case mentioned above was chosen by the broadcaster to maintain a partnership and show content from UNIVASF's WebTV for some years. The TV

network exhibits news of the TV Caatinga in the Jornal da Cultura.

The information was collected and analyzed with Contrastive Ethnography because it is a “multi-case/multi-experiential research” in which the “contrast appears as a significant device, to the extent that you want to approach the creation of particular research construct heuristically” (p. 87).

This “Contrastive Perspective” of the research proposed by Roberto Sidney Macedo instills us to a generative inter-criticism by using an enlarged triangulation of experiences that can be incorporated by a “plurality/heterogeneity pertinent”, which also broadens the creative possibilities of the study of the researched phenomenon and the differentiations relevant to its comprehension (p. 88-89).

The perspectives of both the relational pluralization of the sources and the understandings and the triangularization enable the enrichment and robustness of a Contrastive Ethno-research to the extent that they produce, inter-critically, the significant multiple-voices scheme (MACEDO, 2018, p. 89).

Contrastively, it aimed to understand what was appropriate to generate contextualized knowledge about the semiarid and its people in the programming of broadcasters to be evaluated and what was distorted, consolidating a historically misrepresented view of, at least, misinformed on these territories.

Two reports were analyzed in a contrastive way. The original version, produced by TV Caatinga on tour inspired by Lampião, in the city of Salgueiro, and the version re-edited and enlarged by TV Cultura, which used the original story to address what was called “New Cangaço”. Both reports are available on the Internet.

The analysis was also performed from a “qualitative technique that explores a subject from the search for information, perceptions, and experiences of informants to analyze them and present them in a structured way” (DUARTE, 2011, p. 63).

To understand this process, which implied the representation of the semiarid and the populations that inhabit it, it resorted to ethnoecology, since

it facilitates the field research because it is based on the collection of linguistic data and the criteria that differentiated a linguistic term from another. Thus, the researcher can gradually discover the logical structures that compose the perception of the physical and social Environment (MORÁN, 1990, p. 90).

Considering that “action research has situational

characteristics, since it seeks to diagnose a specific problem in a specific situation, with a view to achieving some practical result" (GIL, 2010, p. 42), in the next step, after taking knowledge of the reaction of the producers of the original content, a contact was made via e-mail with the essay on TV Cultura addressing the negative impact caused in the journalistic sector of the TV Caatinga, with the reissue of the matter. The e-mail was not answered until the conclusion of this work.

It was an attempt to understand the motivation to change the content researched from the guiding elements of Contextualized Journalism with the Brazilian Semiarid, viz. combat x coexistence + experience; water tank truck is the solution?; the haunted cow; fruitless seeds; emblematic floor; education without context; access to land, basic need and media and viability (SANTOS, 2018, p. 154-172). An action to contrast "the knowledge produced and the training experienced/conquered by the subjects" (MACEDO, 2018, p. 105) in the process both singular and relational of ethnic-research-formation.

The contrastive analysis of the collected information helped to seek the answer to the question that guides this work: as journalists of open television broadcasters, such as TV Cultura, appropriated and re-signifies the contents contextualized with the semiarid in their schedules, in order to reinforce the disinformation about these territories and the people who inhabit it?

Through the Contrastive Ethno-research, it was intended to deepen the studied phenomenon to understand it in a sense understood by Roberto Sidnei Macedo (2018), to learn together, create relationships, encompass, combine, and conjugate.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Much is spoken and criticized about the portrait made of the semiarid in journalism. Several types of research have already performed analysis of journalistic coverage during the drought periods in various news programs and more than one broadcaster, pointing out flaws in the account, marked by disinformation and climatic determinism.

However, the study that proposes the Contextualized Journalism with the BSA is the first one to bring along – in practice – an educative approach closer to the reality in those territories. The concept shows to the journalist in a direct way the manner to guide BAS.

The proposal already emerge from the experimentation at the University and reached national TV broadcasters through the display of contextualized products, although it is still necessary to investigate how journalist from these broadcasters receives those contents, once they are opinion leaders and multipliers of information, who so far consolidate the semiarid of

hunger, scourge, misery, and many other afflictions.

To highlight the necessity of deepening the studies on this theme, let us appreciate some situations which at the same time provoke us, intrigue us and instigate us. On the first of February, 2018, the Journal da Cultura exhibited a story about the 80th anniversary of Lampião<sup>2</sup>'s death. Still at the presentation text narrated by the anchor of the news, the date of the death of Virgulino Ferreira da Silva has been connected with the "New Cangaço", a term used to identify the inner violence in the northeastern Brazil which "resist time".

The subsequent news coverage was constructed from the re-issue of a content previously produced by TV Caatinga, WebTV of the Federal University of Vale do São Francisco – Univasf, with the addition of text, sound (interviews) and images.

In the original coverage, the TV Caatinga showed the tourist itinerary "in the footsteps of Lampião" in the city of Serra Talhada, birthplace of said "cangaceiro", which tells the life-story of Virgulino Ferreira from places like the house his grandmother raised him and the Museu of Cangaço, which preserves a collection of objects belonging to the "Serra Talhada" man. The original coverage lasts 5 minutes 12 seconds<sup>3</sup> and narrates the saga of Virgulino in a way to illustrate the tourist route, without producing a value judgment.

However, the text exhibited by TV Cultura begins with the question: "Hero or Villain?" and keeps on sustaining that "during 20 years Lampião and his team of gangsters terrorize the Brazilian backlands with sacks, robberies, and murders. More than 100 deaths are attributed to the known King of Cangaço".

Following this TV Caatinga exhibits images of the news showing the house where Lampião has been raised, followed by an interview of TV Univasf informing that tourists are taken to historical sites where they come to know the trajectory of Lampião in the Cangaço, in the decade of 20 and 30.

Subsequently, the reporter of TV Cultura recites the text: "since a small boy the cangaceiro had contact with violence, as shown by the reporter Cora Macedo", to refer to other excerpts of the report of TV Caatinga at the moment the reporter tells how was the first ambush suffered by Lampião, which would be the reason for Virgulino to become a cangaceiro. In the original report, a source explains that Lampião was never considered a victim of the ambush and that no lawyer wanted to defend him against a wealthy and influential family. This interview that shows TV Cultura did not exhibit the actual

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0FJ3nRQRag>, around 36'46"

<sup>3</sup> Promenade offers to walk on Lampião's shoes: <http://rtvcaatinga.univasf.edu.br/video/pod8nd->



reason for the entry of Virgulino in the Cangaco.

Instead, the text of the reporter of TV Caatinga was followed by the interview of another source that affirms the pride of the residents of the city of Serra Talhada proud to be Lampião's fellow compatriots.

This argumentation is contested afterward in part aggregated to the matter presented by TV Cultura in a text read by Moacir Assunção, who wrote a book about the enemies of Lampião. The newspaperman is categorical in stating that Lampião was a wrongdoer. At that moment the matter exhibited by TV Cultura takes an entirely different direction indicating the hat worn by the Cangaceiros "became one of the symbols of the Northeastern traditions".

The hat would be used again in the text to make another association, seemingly meaningless, when the newspaperman of TV Cultura narrates "even without the Cangaceiros' leather hat, cities in the Northeast part of the country, and other regions as well, face what is called a new Cangaco. "Armed gangs practice robberies and kidnappings, and use the population as a shield." The images illustrating the text are from security cameras that display the action of burglars. The journalist report lasts two minutes and forty-seven seconds.

When we watch TV Cultura, we ask ourselves what is the relationship these robberies would have with the term "new Cangaco"? Would it be only the territorial issue, although it is not revealed where the thefts take place? Which is the difference between the robberies and the action similarly made by the bandits exploding ATMs and robbing banks in other regions of the country?

Furthermore, comparing the original report of TV Caatinga with that of TV Cultura, we can detect the extent the original issue was distorted, since the initial content gives visibility to a tourist route in the semiarid zone, promoting another look on these territories commonly ruled in a negative procedure.

It is noteworthy that according to information from the reporter of the WebTV, when the professionals of TV Cultura contacted their colleagues of TV Caatinga, they requested some content to memorize the 80th anniversary of the death of Lampião in 2018. There was not a moment when it is said that there would be a re-issue and association of content with what the broadcaster calls "new Cangaco".

After being aware of the reaction of the producers of the original issue, on the occasion of the national network display, contact was made via e-mail with the matter of TV Cultura addressing the negative impact caused by the information, and with TV Caatinga, on the re-issue of the case. Suffice to say that these e-mails have not been answered until the conclusion of this study. This behavior demonstrates the lack of interest in maintaining a

dialogue with the partner university broadcaster who has since that time has been trying to re-discuss the terms of partnership before submitting new contents to be displayed.

It is also observed intentionality of the changing of information to adapt them to the intended approach, although this has impaired the channeling of the matter, with incoherent, unreasonable, and imaginative connotations. It seems that the distorted re-signification was already defined when the program was required, perhaps, for this reason, the proposal was not adequately publicized.

Differently, broadcasters such as Futura Channel, TV NBR, TV Brasil, and TV Educativa da Bahia frequently display contents of TV Caatinga which unveil the semiarid zone in a contextualized way.

Amongst the most varied examples, we can see releases featuring stylized Quadrilha Juninas and discussing the traditional and current styles, which also motivated the production of a 25-minute thematic program with two interviewers at the television studio (Futura, 1.06.18)<sup>4</sup>; the exhibition by TV NBR of an environmental education program debating the agro-ecology practiced by the farmers in the semiarid zone (18.07.18 and 15.08.18); TV Brasil showing the whole country the initiative of a couple who built what they have called a "bio-pleasing house" with materials reused and that would have been discarded in the dumpsite (27.10.2018)<sup>5</sup>, and the report about women who were walking down the roads of Motorcycle Sertão, exhibited in the sports programs of TVE da Bahia (11.10.18).

Observing a distorted kind of approach in a broadcaster maintained by Padre Anchieta Foundation, which announces on their website that education, journalism, citizenship, and culture are some of the priorities in their vehicles of communication, which "have as a principle the support to independent production, to regionalized programs and the exhibition of Brazilian cinematographic works, bringing to the general audience the knowledge and the cultural diversity"<sup>6</sup>, and otherwise wholly different to see the display by other broadcaster of contents that discuss the semiarid zone and its people more contemporaneously and closer to their reality, which leads to some interrogations: at what extent contextualized materials provoke a reflection about the distorted approach practiced in the productions about the semiarid and its people? How do the opinion makers who receive the contextualized content in these broadcasters seize this

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.futuraplay.org/quadrilhas-de-festas-juninas433057/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://tvbrasil.ebc.com.br/reporter-brasil/2018/10/casa-no-interior-da-bahia-e-chamada-de-bio-a-gradavel>

<sup>6</sup> Description obtained at the site of Fundação Padre Anchieta: <http://fpa.com.br/fundacao/>

proposal? How do the appropriate and re-signify these contents and how is this echoed in the production of knowledge of the programming of these broadcasters? How far do they approach or withdraw from the initially contextualized proposal? Those are themes for new debates.

These are some of the concerns raised by this study, since the Contextualized Journalism related to the Brazilian Semiarid constitutes an educational proposal in the field of communication, which provoke on us to rethink the usual approach that has been made on these territories, and their people as well.

## V. CONCLUSION

Since man is a product of self-creation and consequently a result of human action, we sought to understand how those who produce and disseminate information in the media understand the proposal of Contextualized Journalism with the Brazilian Semiarid and whether it really is available to rethink what kind of representation would approach the reality of these territories and their people.

In the republished and enlarged issue, analyzed in this paper contrastively with the first content, it was observed that the new version was a complete adulteration of the original report, which not only compromised the proposal of the initial release, but as altered Dramatically its meaning to reinforce a negative and distorted image about the semiarid territories.

As there was no transparency when revealing the actual proposal of the matter requested to the university broadcaster producing the original content, as well as no response to the e-mail questioning the modification of the first report, it is understood that the change was carried out intentionally and that a re-signification was already defined to reinforce distortions and misinformation about the semiarid zones, consolidated by the media in a recurrent way.

But if on the one hand it is observed behaviors that reinforce and reveal the lack of information about these territories, as in the case studied in this paper, on the other hand the study also demonstrated examples in which the contextualized content fulfills its educational role, disseminating knowledge in the programming of broadcasters that publish the content without alterations and distortions that impair the proposal in its entirety.

Accordingly, this study may lead to other reflections such as: what kind of contextualized content it is being selected for display in the programming of broadcasters? How are these contents apprehended by the opinion makers of these channels? Which kind of knowledge does the content generate for these subjects? Are they somehow influenced by another way of guiding

the semiarid territories? What kind of discourse is elaborated by them, specifically at the head<sup>7</sup> of the subjects, from the contact with the contextualized content? Relevant and necessary questions for opinion makers and content producers in communication interested in producing quality information, with a closer assessment of the reality of the semiarid territories of Brazil and their people.

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<sup>7</sup> Head means the enunciate elaborated by the editor of the text which will be narrated by the presenter of the TV program, as in the news.